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ABSTRACT

The Tasmania Department of Education and the Arts commissioned policy research in February 1992 to identify forms of accountability preferred by stakeholders. This paper describes the policy-research project that sought to clarify the accountability processes and the criteria for collecting data and improving the quality of learning, teaching, and leadership in Tasmania. The research process was based on a critical-pragmatist epistemology. Its outcomes informed the design of a new 3-year, school-review process that seeks to integrate local governance, school planning, action-research evaluation, external reviews, and systemic performance assessment. Underlying the recommended policy is a touchstone set of processes and criteria that comprise a theory of mutual and educative accountability. The theory coheres with liberal, democratic, and limited forms of community government; educative leadership; and ideally, communitarian rather than collegial forms of professionalism. The challenge was to assemble the forms of educative accountability preferred by the immediate stakeholders, develop a state education-accountability policy that promised to "prove" and "improve" public education, and advance accountability policymaking in schools. All policy preferences articulated by school-community and stakeholder groups were included in the Accountability Policy Questionnaire, which was used to measure the level of support within each stakeholder group for each policy proposal. Seven tables are included. (Contains 34 references.) (LMI)

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Building a Communitarian Policy of Educative Accountability using a Critical-Pragmatist Epistemology*

Reynold Macpherson**

Paper presented to the American Educational Researchers Association Conference, 24-28 March 1997, Chicago.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a policy research project intended to clarify the accountability processes and criteria that should be used to collect data, report and improve the quality of learning, teaching and leadership in Tasmania. The research process used a critical-pragmatist epistemology. Its outcomes informed the design of a new three year school review process that seeks to integrate local governance, school planning, action research evaluation, external reviews, and a systemic performance monitoring. Behind the recommended policy is a touchstone set of processes and criteria that comprise a theory of mutual and educative accountability. This theory coheres with liberal, democratic and limited forms of community government, educative leadership, and ideally, communitarian rather than collegial forms of professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

The Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts (DEA) commissioned policy research in February 1992 to identify forms of accountability preferred by stakeholders. It was made clear that, "in mapping forms of accountability, the project will address the criteria and the processes that are or should be used to identify, report on, and improve learning, teaching and leadership" (Harrington, 1992, p. 1). Parenting and governing mechanisms were not mentioned but emerged later as important issues. The memorandum also indicated that the findings would be "reported in 1994 in a form which will assist school communities and the Department to review their accountability policies" (p.1).

The project design assumed that accountability policy in education is an expression of theories about (a) what constitutes valuable knowledge, (b) how learning, teaching and leadership can be demonstrated and improved, and (c) how obligations should be built and discharged between stakeholders in a policy community. The project is now placed in context.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY CHALLENGE IN TASMANIA

The accountability policy documents of the 1990s on the small island state of Tasmania have embedded accountability mechanisms in planning, resource management, monitoring, reviewing and reporting functions (eg. DEA, 1993). This bureaucratic design was justified by a systems theory of organisation and a corporate model of 'self-management'. Schools were expected to have an 'accountability cycle' that cohered with the DEA's strategic plans and evaluation activities. Senior school personnel were required to implement policy statements in consultation with district superintendents. Schools councils were *not* empowered to provide governance or accountability. The stress was on 'proving' rather than 'improving' education, reporting outcomes using different forms of evidence, and coordinating the information collected by schools through the system's line management hierarchy.

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There were also marked differences between federal and state jurisdictions on whether accountability policy should both prove *and* improve public schools. Australian national policy communities have shown markedly less interest in school community capacity building in the 1980s and 1990s (Pusey, 1991). National policy discourse has featured commodification, vocationalism and quantification (Yeatman, 1990). The emphasis has been on empirical performance and outcomes indicators that correlate with, and thus justify, accounts of expenditure. The stress has been on productivity and political forms of accountability.

In Tasmania, successive governments and the DEA have sustained an additional interest in the accountability criteria and processes that enhance learning conditions, professional development and school improvement. The focus has been on professionally effective forms of accountability. The strategic challenge for the DEA has, therefore, been to balance political and productivity accountability with more professional and developmental forms of accountability. The three-part policy research challenge identified was to assemble the forms of 'educative accountability' preferred by immediate stakeholders, to develop a state education accountability policy that promises to both 'prove' and 'improve' public education, and to advance accountability policy making capacity in schools. The policy research process developed to assist with this strategy is summarised in the next section.

EPISTEMICALLY CRITICAL POLICY RESEARCH

Preliminary data and documentary evidence collected in 1992 and 1993 using school community workshops and stakeholder focus groups showed that three mutually exclusive perspectives dominated a largely paralysed policy discourse. The three views (see Table 1) reflected technical or systemic, professional and client interests, much as identified in the UK and US (Kogan, 1986; Elmore and Associates, 1990). They appeared to be mutually exclusive, and, since they were buttressed by deep beliefs about other stakeholders' views, quite unlikely to change.

Table 1: Dominant Perspectives on Accountability Policy in Tasmanian Education, 1992

Perspective	DEA Officials	Teachers	Parents
Primary purposes.	Prove and improve the quality and equity of schools and the system.	Demonstrate, reiterate and celebrate professionalism.	Publicly demonstrate the quality and fairness of services to clients.
Best target for reform.	Curriculum, teaching, leadership, assessment and evaluation in schools.	Professionalism of teachers and school leaders and resource policies.	The power relationships between providers and clients.
Conditions crucial for improvement.	Teaching, learning and leadership to be based on DEA published policies.	Teachers and team leaders to develop their judgment and control their own work.	Principals and teachers to account directly to parents and their community.
Best source of criteria.	Principles of line management.	Principles of professionalism.	Clients' experiences and consequences of outcomes.
Most appropriate accountability processes.	System sets policies, priorities purposes and performance indicators. Use objective performance and outcomes data to use in the next planning round. Embed accountability in school planning and development strategies.	Professionals empowered to review school policies and priorities. Expert planning and cooperative teaching and learning. Collaborative staff action research reported to parents and system.	School councils to review outcomes and govern school policies, evaluation and development plans. Stakeholders participate in school planning and evaluation of learning, teaching, leadership and governance.

On the other hand the early data also revealed an awareness that accountability was an important means of reconstructing policy legitimacy, the rationality of public schooling and the commitment of participants and stakeholders. The establishment of an Educational Review Unit (ERU) in the DEA was held to be a structural expression of this awareness. The ERU was asked to both demonstrate and develop the quality of schools and boost confidence in public schooling, essentially by coordinating reviews of systemic policy and institutions. However, while 'proving' the performance of schools apparently required little more than the positivist techniques of Quality Assurance, it was increasingly realised that 'improvement' and public legitimacy would require much more complex forms of capacity building in school communities.

While positivist research uses empirical facts to improve policies, post-positivist research uses many forms of information and a process of conjecture and refutation to advance the quality of theories being used to justify policies (Phillips, 1983). The practical and methodological implications are immense, especially if the pluralism of stakeholders in public education is acknowledged. It was agreed that policy research should focus not on the empirical evidence of practices but on the quality of theories used to provide practices with legitimacy and problem-solving potency.

The project began by mapping the theories of stakeholders in natural settings over two years. Qualitative methods were used to gather theories about what 'educative accountability' might be. These theories were elicited as 'policy preferences'. Two general research questions were used. What processes (procedures, actions or methods) should be used to collect data, report on and improve students' learning, teachers' teaching and leaders' leadership? What criteria (standards, benchmarks or indicators) should be used to evaluate students' learning, teachers' teaching and leaders' leadership? Feedback processes were designed to verify the data and exchange interpretations (Crowther & Gibson, 1990).

All policy preferences articulated by school community and stakeholder groups were accepted, refined and converted into Likert items. All policy proposals were included. The *Accountability Policy Questionnaire (APQ)* then measured the extent to which each stakeholder group, including administrators at all levels, supported each policy proposal (see Macpherson, 1996a; 1996b). At this point the theories in use were considered to be mapped in qualitative, conceptual, quantitative and political terms.

International resources (eg. Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988; Fuhrman, & Malen, 1991; McDonnell, 1994; OECD, 1995; Monk & Roellke, 1996; Cibulka & Derlin, 1996; Wong & Moulton, 1996) and stakeholders' interpretations were then added to the process of systemic reflection. Policy seminars facilitated the collective interpretation and application of findings in central, district and school settings. A number of papers were drafted, presented and later published. Meetings with DEA and Treasury officials in 1995 and 1996 related the findings to the formative evaluation of schools and to the quality of systemic service delivery systems.

This approach tested three post-positivist ideas concerning the growth of knowledge. The first was that policy knowledge grows not by testing hypotheses with empirical proof but by an interactive process of conjecture and refutation that develops people's theories; theories conceived as webs of belief (Quine & Ullian, 1978). The second was that stakeholder-sensitive policy research can identify where theories in use already overlap, despite the existence of apparently mutually exclusive perspectives reflecting group interests (Lakatos, 1970). The third was that negotiations between stakeholders can develop the areas of overlap found, and through constant comparison with ideas from elsewhere, expand the policy touchstone available (Evers & Lakomski, 1991).

None of these three ideas about the growth of policy knowledge were refuted in practice. Although there were moments when ego, altruism and creativity where given epistemic privileges by policy actors, the endurance of these three ideas and the production of substantial policy touchstone suggests that a major part of the problem of accountability policy making in the past could well have been epistemological in nature.

The findings are now discussed as appropriate practices, implications for stakeholders and then as a rationale or theory for an educative accountability policy in Tasmania.

Processes and Criteria

The policy proposals considered worthy of consideration in Tasmanian public schools and at state level by all stakeholders were interpreted in various ways. The first interpretation by all stakeholders was to see the ideas that all supported (>70% Agreed or Strongly Agreed) as a 'check list' that should be used to develop or affirm 'best practices.' While the language of interpretation and the implications drawn depended on the stakeholder group, as explained below, the eighty items were soon clustered into 'sets of accountability processes and criteria' (see Table 2). Abbreviated items from the *APQ* are in lower case. The italicised cluster labels were used to identify the nature and scope of the 'common ground' between stakeholders or 'touchstone.' An Australian theory of educative leadership (Duignan & Macpherson, 1992, pp. 171-185) was adopted to show how activities cohered.

Table 2 Six Sets of Educative Accountability Criteria and Processes

Evaluative Activity	Philosophical Activity
Monitors Outcomes and Attitudes	***Clarifies Organisational Purposes***
samples student work (eg. folios)	provides and generates a school vision
measures progress of individual students	develops coherence between the school vision, the
ensures that teachers use written checklists and	development plan and outcomes
running records to monitor student progress	***Links Evaluation to Planning***
uses reports from other support staff	helps teachers evaluate and plan their programs
(eg. guidance, welfare, speech and health specialists)	systematically
uses performance indicators in state and national policies	helps teachers develop performance indicators at subject
(eg. Frameworks, Profiles)	moderation meetings
measures students' self-esteem and life skills	helps teachers develop performance indicators in school
measures attitudes of students to school,	helps teachers evaluate and plan lessons thoroughly
teachers, peers, learning and homework,	***Creates a Learning Organisation***
measures teachers' attitude towards students,	shares reflections in peer networks on
parents and colleagues,	the challenges of practice
surveys school climate, uses feedback from staff	develop others' capacities as learners and researchers
Provides Feedback and Appraisal Systems	negotiates new goals for professional development
uses feedback on teaching and leadership	encourages teachers to read and do research
from parents and students	develops the judgements made by teachers
uses feedback and appraisal by peers	enhances teachers' knowledge (of subject matter
uses appraisal of leadership services by school colleagues	and child/adolescent development)
encourages self-evaluation, self-appraisal	values creativity and productivity in the school
reports teacher appraisals to the individual teacher	reviews the quality of planning
Develops Formative Evaluation Systems	reviews the quality of policy making strategies used
uses objective assessment to plan improvements	uses a mentoring process
to students' learning	
develops formative evaluation related to teaching objectives	

Management Activity	Strategic Planning Activity
Manages the Making and Implementing of Policies	***Provides Collaborative Strategic Analysis***
supports participative governance processes	negotiates priorities and outcomes
implements school and curriculum policies effectively	helps others make and plan the implementation of policy
Organises Support Structures and Processes	provides conferencing between teachers and students
organises the support and feedback given to staff	helps parents/teachers/students jointly develop
organises the evaluation of teaching and learning	learning indicators
organises and develops instructional expertise	provides parents with curriculum goals, outcomes
organises training and support to identify and	and individual expectations at the beginning of the year
cope with students 'at risk'	***Negotiates Performance Indicators***
organises how students' work is set, monitored and marked	helps teachers identify intended outcomes for each student
Manages the Use of Resources	includes indicators from research as criteria when
organises the use of time and other resources	planning improvements to students' learning
organises budgeting processes	negotiates indicators of learning by staff
	negotiates indicators of quality teaching with staff
	Prepares a Professional Development Strategy
	plans the professional development of teachers
	raises the willingness of staff to engage in continuing
	professional development

Cultural Activity	Political Activity
Develops Supportive Classroom Environments	***Raises Commitment***
encourages collaborative classroom environments	encourages collaborative decision-making
develops supportive behaviour management skills	develops student and teacher morale and motivation
promotes positive attitudes in children (eg. enthusiasm)	encourages parent /teacher interviews
improves interpersonal communications in the classroom	develops staff support for their leaders
Develops a Supportive School Environment	***Communicates Priorities and Values***
leaders hear and care for others	provides parents with opportunities to give their views

Table continued

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develops an open and participative culture
promotes parent/teacher/student discussions
encourages co-operative learning between colleagues (eg. by mentoring and discussion between colleagues)
provides a transition program for newly appointed teachers
provides skill development programs, especially in governance and management

and to discuss teaching and curriculum policies
reports to parents with clear and accurate descriptions of learning
reports student's learning through Newsletters, school magazines, displays and positive public relations
reports achievements to parents and the community
documents best practices
values internal and external two-way communications

School Community Policy Making

The second general interpretation was that these ideas should be made available as a resource to school policy communities and stakeholder executives as soon as possible; for their own interpretation and use. It was assumed that the ideas would only be used when they were added to the understandings in each community, and further, that in doing so, the process would help them build their policy making and implementation capacities. All stakeholder executives, professional associations and many schools were encouraged to organise briefings, conference presentations, workshops or focus groups. The DEA also recognised wider audiences and responsibilities when it arranged to present the findings in interstate settings and encouraged international dissemination (Macpherson, 1996c).

The third general interpretation in each stakeholder executive or school policy committee was the 'good sense' of applying *the standards* explicit in the touchstone. They were used to evaluate items that had nearly attracted general support, to set aside policy myths and to affirm a rational and moral basis for practice. They were added to the normative base in many settings and to the standards used by district superintendents for reviewing practices and policies in schools. The construction of touchstone can therefore be seen as a process of departitioning policy knowledge about what 'educative accountability' might be. Conversely, the persistent partitions in policy knowledge were found to relate to the structures and priorities established by prior governance structures and practices. This drew attention to the governance values of stakeholders.

Governance Values

It was noted that the proposals for multiple zones of legitimacy (Kogan, 1986) and for more communitarian policies in England and Wales (Gray & Wilcox, 1995), and for more issue-based (Monk & Roellke, 1996), more equitable (Berry & Ginsberg, 1996) and more authentic accountability policies in the US (eg. Darling-Hammond, Snyder, Ancess, Einbender, Goodwin & Macdonald, 1993), assumed pluralism in society. This was taken to imply that governance structures in public education were possibly obsolete.

Tasmanian stakeholders were found to prefer more communitarian, limited and local forms of government than representative, centralist or hierarchical governance structures. With parents in the vanguard, they expressed a desire for cooperative politics and far greater structural subsidiarity, pluriformity and complimentarity. This suggested that the current formal accountability policy (DEA, 1993), which presumes neo-centralism, 'self-managing' corporate managerialism, uniformity and comparability, is obsolete in political and governance terms. The practical implications are considerable.

One implication explored in many settings was that policy making must respect the humanist propositions that follow. Each school policy community is as unique as the people that constitute it. The boundaries of each school community may be defined by its immediate stakeholders; students, teachers, parents, the local community and the state of Tasmania. These stakeholders comprise a policy community with limited rights to self-government. This form of limited government shares sovereignty with state and federal forms of government. Each of these forms of government are to be equally valued and require democratic constitutions that specify limited and interdependent sovereignty. The limits of sovereignty prescribe zones of legitimacy.

Similarly, to avoid extremes of isolationism and sectarianism, a number of groups considered the idea that the constitutions of school communities should specify the nature of their relationships with other jurisdictions. The vertical governance relationship between federal, state and school community zones of legitimacy, for example, should be marked by

respectful subsidiarity rather than neo-centralist hierarchy. Further, the horizontal governance relationship between them should be marked by cooperative complimentarity rather than cool or contrived comparability. Given the dual responsibilities of public schools, to both reproduce and transform the values of civil society, the general view was that the political relationships within each school community should be structured to reflect the values of a liberal democracy (Dunleavy & O'Leary, 1987).

Governance Structures

The shift in governance structures discussed in Tasmania was, therefore, towards pluralism and away from monism; the belief that there is a unitary state in which one nation or people, in an unbroken territory, should have one set of laws, values and social relations. Accepting the pluralistic beliefs of Tasmanian stakeholders was taken to imply guaranteeing pluriformity in organisational structures, celebrating minority rights, tolerating degrees of separatism, and accepting diverse customs, religious and moral beliefs and habits of association.

An immediate implication in Tasmania is that boards of school community trustees will need to replace school councils. School community governance and accountability powers will need to be vested in these boards of trustees. While boards of trustees will need to be structured to guarantee a technical majority to students and parents, to acknowledge of their prior constitutional rights concerning education, membership will need to otherwise exhibit a balanced representation of stakeholders. The rights, responsibilities and obligations of all stakeholders will require articulation by school communities within general democratic principles. Operational guidelines suggested by the sponsoring jurisdiction, without any intimation of superordinacy, would be considered helpful.

Applying the principles of subsidiarity, complimentarity and pluriformity in such a form of limited self government will also require significant changes to current accountability practices. Contractual accountability to employers, parents or designated corporate managers will have to be replaced by locally negotiated mutual accountability. Agreements will have to specify the responsibilities, obligations, evaluation criteria and processes that apply to each group of stakeholders. Similarly, the concept of 'moral' accountability will have to decoupled from 'client accountability' and be recognised as considerably more than just maintaining market and political relationships. Instead, 'moral accountability' should be defined as the ethics of discharging obligations between stakeholders. Such obligations will need to be spelled out by boards of school community trustees, and moreover, regularly contested. Written obligations would include codes of professional practice, classroom and staffroom relationships, parenting, leadership and governance. Some of the implications specific to stakeholder groups are now clarified.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Parents and Students

The touchstone strongly endorsed the principles developed by the Australian Council of State School Organisations and Australian Parents Council (1996, p. 11). They had called for effective, just, equitable and ethically defensible assessment and reporting procedures, summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 ACCSO/ APC Principles for Assessment and Reporting Procedures

1	Parents are entitled to continuing, quality information regarding their children's education through a variety of reporting mechanisms.
2	Any form of assessment should be integral to the curriculum and designed to inform, support and improve learning outcomes.
3	Assessment and reporting processes should make provision for parent and student input about teaching and learning.

Table continued

4	Parents and their organisations must have an active role in developing and implementing assessment and reporting policies and processes at the school, the system, the state and the nation.
5	School systems and governments, state and federal, must make explicit and public, the purposes for which they wish to collect assessment data.
6	Assessment data must not be used for the purpose of establishing and publishing competitive judgements about schools/ systems/ states or territories.
7	All those who seek data about student performance must inform parents of the uses to which such information will be put.
8	Data collected from students in school should be used in accordance with its stated purposes. Any other subsequent uses should be specifically negotiated.
9	Individual student assessments are confidential to the student, his/ her parents and appropriate school staff.
10	Parents have the right to withdraw their children from specific system, statewide and national testing.
11	Assessment data for statewide or national purposes should be collected by statistically valid, light sampling procedures only.
12	Appropriate appeal mechanisms should be established and made public to protect the rights of students and parents in matters of student assessment and reporting at the school, state and national level.

The touchstone was also used to identify the political values currently favoured in school communities (see Table 4).

Table 4 Political Accountability Touchstone in Tasmania's Public Education Stakeholders

Obsolete Political Touchstone	Current Political Touchstone
a neo-centralist and unitary concept of 'system'	classrooms relationships seen as primary educational structure
planning, coordination and policy implementation by 'self-managing' corporate managers	an inclusionary, simultaneous and holistic approach to policy making, planning and implementation
comparative assessment of learning, teaching and leadership	cooperative mutual accountability featuring formative evaluation of learning, teaching and leadership
partitioned curriculum and standardised resource management	a liberal, communitarian, pragmatic and pluralist philosophy of administration
communications within and between stakeholders being mediated by positional authority	a trustful, supportive and group-based approach to change management
incentives being based on political or market devices	improvement, accountability and legitimation seen as school community projects
hierarchy, uniformity and comparability	subsidiarity, pluriformity and complementarity

One notable omission to Table 4 is any reference to accountability criteria and processes that relate to being an accountable parent or a student. Like governance, they were not associated with 'educative accountability' at the outset of the policy research process. Since any holistic and coherent school community accountability policy would have to integrate the rights and obligations that attend being a student or a parent, this was regarded by stakeholders as an oversight.

Teachers

The touchstone created by this research was used by teachers to generate a fresh moral, political and practical mandate they termed 'professionalism'. This interpretation was, in the main, drawn out of a humanist, constructivist and communitarian theory of effective teaching, learning and leadership. In some circumstances, a minority of teachers employed a more individualistic philosophy of teaching while others legitimated their practices using

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peer norms. The differences between individualistic, collegial and community forms accountability were of considerable interest in groups of educators.

The first of two conclusions felt by teachers to be consistent with the touchstone is that accountability policies are needed to encourage colleagues to move from the feral norms of uncontestable and hyper individualistic 'professionalism' to more collegial norms, and then, to move from a closed peer culture of collegialism towards an open communitarian model that anchors the legitimacy of professional practice in school community development. The second conclusion reached was that the move from hyper individualistic professionalism might be facilitated by collaborative forms of professional activity, and then to more communitarian norms by authentic participation in the co-leadership and co-governance of school communities. Such an enabling strategy would initially help committed teachers to reconstruct their theories of accountability and professionalism in a supportive peer group, and then in a supportive community context. The strategy proposed is further clarified in Table 5 (⇒ means 'ideally develops into').

Table 5 Hyper Individualistic, Collegial and Communitarian forms of Professional Accountability

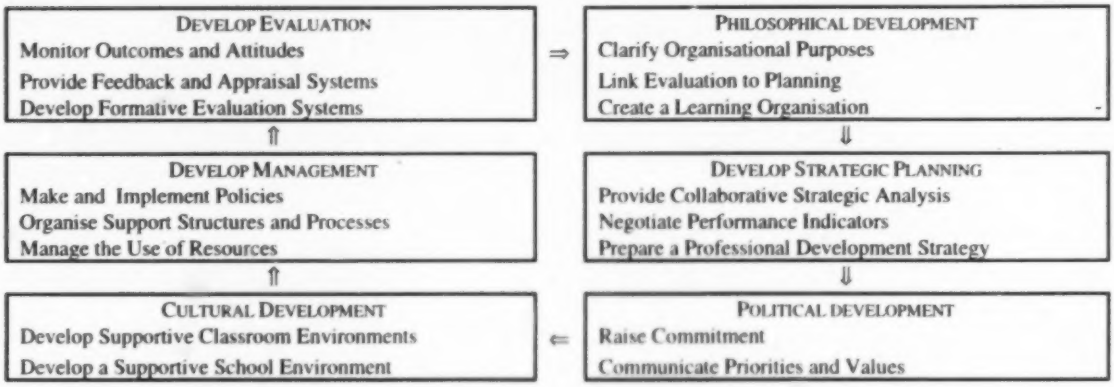
Professional Accountability	Hyper Individualistic ⇒	Collegial ⇒	Communitarian
Main Purposes	Report student achievement and improve home support for the teaching program.	Report learning and improve teaching and home support for the school program.	Reports and improves learning, teaching, parenting and school community leadership and governance.
Appropriate Strategies	Professional evaluation and reporting of student's learning.	Peer professional formative evaluation of teaching and learning.	Formative evaluation and mutual accountability of learning, teaching, parenting, leadership and governance.
Source of Evaluation Criteria	An empirical project; students' comparative ability and application.	A collegial project; achievement profiles and negotiated peer standards.	A community policy project; to balance excellence, equity, choice, community ...
Appropriate Accountability Processes	Confidential consultation alone with parent.	Collective methods such as moderation and student/ teacher/ parent conferencing.	Collective methods located within school community action research.
Strengths	Focus on student progress. Provides implications for supportive parenting.	Focus on supportive classroom and home relationships and on professional development.	Openness to feedback and critical evaluation. Community organisational learning.
Limits	Uncontestable norms. Decouples learning from teaching and governance. No feedback implies limited professional development.	Closed intra-collegial norms. Decouples learning and teaching from parenting, leadership and governance.	Vulnerability to external and non-educational political agendas.
Appropriate Professional Development	Cooperative peer evaluation, joint planning and team teaching.	Cooperative internal-external consultancies. Participate in leadership and governance.	Participate in school community action research and governance.

Another limitation of the research project is apparent at this point. While the methodology drew out the ideal of communitarian professionalism, it was also intimated that actual practices were probably clustered around collegialism with a tail extending in both directions. Follow up research might use semantic differential analysis to measure the extent to which practices differ from the ideal in each stakeholder group. This method would also signal the potential need for intervention.

It was also discovered that teachers conceived of professional development as a cyclical and educative process that reviewed and advanced policy knowledge in an incremental

manner, not dissimilar to Hodgkinson's (1981) taxonomy of the policy process. Teachers used the clusters of touchstone items to suggest how the components of a school community development model of educative accountability work sequentially in practice. Their model is summarised in Figure 1, where the directional symbol ⇒ means 'leads to'.

Figure 1 A School Community Development Model of Educative Accountability



The directionality was also explained with reference to 'action research' (Burns, 1994, pp. 293-309). The coherence between an action research process designed to create an educative accountability policy and the teachers' model of school community development are clarified in Table 6.

Table 6 Action Research and School Community Development Processes

Policy Action Research Phases Objectives, Processes, Key Issues	Teachers' School Community Development Model
1. *Define accountability together*. Collective mapping of the situation. Plural stakeholder views, interests and values.	Clarify Organisational Purposes Create a Learning Organisation Communicate Priorities and Values
2. *Describe the policy challenge of accountability in context*. Joint specification of key aspects. Antecedents, causes, effects, terms.	Provide Collaborative Strategic Analysis Link Evaluation to Planning
3. Review wider knowledge of policies and practices. Research and search teams commissioned and report. Alternative ideas, policies, trials and findings.	Provide Collaborative Strategic Analysis Link Evaluation to Planning
4. *Gather and evaluate consequences of options*. Cooperative evaluation of the relative merits of options. Competing explanations and solutions.	Provide Collaborative Strategic Analysis Link Evaluation to Planning Raise Commitment
5. *Deciding policies and planning practices*. Select strategies and joint planning. Feasible? Beneficial? Plausible? Educational? 6. *Action*. Teams are organised to accomplish specific tasks. What? Why? Who? When? With? How? Evaluation?	Make and Implement Policies Manage the Use of Resources Organise Support Structures and Processes Negotiate Performance Indicators Prepare a Professional Development Strategy Develop Supportive Classroom Environments Develop a Supportive School Environment
7. *Evaluate policy outcomes*. Collective review and report. History of ideas, intended and unintended effects.	Monitor Outcomes and Attitudes Provide Feedback and Appraisal Systems Develop Formative Evaluation Systems
1a. *Redefine accountability together* ... Joint formative evaluation and mapping of the situation ... Newly revealed challenges, views, interests and values ...	Clarify Organisational Purposes Create a Learning Organisation Communicate Priorities and Values

The differences in emphasis concerning the clarification and communication of organisational purposes are again traceable to the extent to which teachers take a collegial or communitarian view of what 'the school' should ideally be as a policy community. The similarities reflect the ubiquitous touchstone of 'educative accountability'. A central theme of Tables 5 and 6 is the close relationship between participative learning and the growth of holistic organisational knowledge. Another is that this close relationship coheres with a communitarian theory of mutual accountability.

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Principals

The touchstone was interpreted by principals as providing a coherent, moral and educational mandate for particular forms of leadership and governance services. These services were required, it was argued, so that Tasmanian state schools might better review and develop their accountability policies as policy communities. Hence the conclusion reached that the professional development of principals needs to help prepare practitioners in specific skills and understandings concerning leadership and governance.

It is notable that the skills and understandings in Table 5 were identified as 'key competencies'. Give the analysis above, they can also be seen to be 'key' in the sense that they are essential to the development of action research processes, communitarian professionalism and mutual accountability in a policy community of stakeholders.

The way that principals responded was instructive. They co-opted the managerial language of competencies, reinforced their collective identity as principals and reiterated their moral stewardship as educators. They used the touchstone to supplement and interpret the ideology of national policy that stresses productivity and political accountability. They used familiar metaphors to present a new 'common sense' policy when touchstone had been added to shared webs of belief. In sum, diverse values on accountability were colonised by and reconciled with the touchstone (Gee, 1990).

On the other hand the principals involved in interpretation were very aware of the huge challenges implied by these conclusions. They reported that many of their peers would have to adopt a more collaborative and inclusionary philosophy concerning parental expectations and participation, greater openness and responsiveness to alternative evaluation criteria, more actively facilitate critical dialogue between stakeholders, and enhance the quality of appraisal mechanisms and feedback data in many aspects of school community policy making. Accountability processes related to the quality of teaching, leadership, governance and parenting were all regarded as being at a relatively early stage of development, well behind the sophistication of 'teacher development' processes.

Another major challenge identified was the quality of pedagogy. While principals found the criteria and processes in Tables 2 and 5 worthy of close consideration in staffrooms, they also noted the need to involve stakeholders in extra-peer accountability processes in order to raise the level of construct validity, reliability and policy legitimation.

A third key concern was the narrow range of leadership accountability processes in use. They were currently limited to self-initiated peer appraisal and networking, the annual planning cycle and the school review process. Principals' associations and other stakeholders who valued leadership development in school communities were asked to review leadership development strategies.

In sum, the obligations involved in leadership development clarified by principals were summarised as four imperatives. There are many appraisal and reporting mechanisms available and areas worthy of improvement concerning the quality of leadership services in school communities. Raising leadership capacities in school communities is essential to improving the quality of teaching, parenting and learning. Executive teams must accept initial responsibility for developing leadership services in their school community, even in advance of stakeholders' expectations, until such time that governance capacities develop. School community government needs to value, plan for, develop and celebrate pro-active leadership.

System Administrators

The interpretation of findings provided by DEA central and district personnel were affected by structural and political turbulence, periods of paralysis in government and tightening constraints on public expenditure. The core duties of central DEA officials had been modified by a new contractual accountability relationship between government and executive. They were engaged more than ever in 'the business' of government, helping to 'reposition' the government's service profile, and rationalising services.

Sustaining the professional commitment of colleagues was a major challenge in such circumstances. Another was building the capacities that would enable policy communities to become 'learning organisations' (Argyris & Schön, 1978). A third challenge was mediating

across the cultural boundaries between public administration and education. A fourth was advocating equity and excellence as equally important educational policy principles.

Whatever the priorities of the wider public service, the DEA valued leadership that celebrated the plurality of Tasmanian society. While it answered regularly according to productivity and political criteria, it also promoted means of developing the philosophical and strategic capacities of school policy communities. Hence, while the DEA quickly adopted the touchstone as *de facto* policy, and accepted supported items as 'best practices,' four forms of support services were subjected to critical review.

School support services were evaluated in terms of their capacity to (a) promote professional development, (b) facilitate school community development, (c) aggregate needs and (d) raise the effectiveness of delivery systems. Second, testing policies, programs and practices were evaluated and changes accelerated. Third, impetus was added to the review of equity policies and programs. Fourth, four myths related to leadership services were identified as impeding school community development; (a) responsibility for providing leadership is vested in positions, (b) teachers' leadership responsibilities are limited to the classroom, (c) parents and students have no leadership responsibilities in schools, and (d) 'the school' is a professional community requiring professional leadership.

The DEA expected current leaders in schools to build the required forms of government, strategic leadership and planning and change management capacities. They believed that concept of mutual accountability would continue to 'build on the high ground,' meaning on the 'moral high ground' and challenge 'professional autonomy.' They repeatedly emphasised a social and communal rationale for accountability, coherence between philosophy and action, and the need for reflective action or Aristotelian *praxis*. Given the limits of collegialism summarised in Table 5, they concluded that (a) opportunities for positive co-governance and co-management experiences, and (b) better access to critical and external perspectives both required higher priority.

A new three-year school review cycle was designed to gain greater coherence between internal and external accountability criteria and processes, to provide supportive privileges to 'under-performing' schools, and to collect systemic accountability data that could also be converted into comparative benchmarks. The model is summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 Tasmania's Three-year School Review Cycle to be introduced in 1997

Year	Activity	Processes, Data and Criteria
1	Assisted School Review	• 'Best practice indicators' data on teaching and learning, leadership and management, and professional and staff development. • Perceptions; evaluative feedback from parents, students and staff. • Empirical data; examination results, DART scores, key intended numeracy and literacy outcomes data, retention rates and student outcomes.
	School Improvement Planning	• Recommendations for action embedded in the School Improvement Plan which is to be approved by the District Superintendent. • 'Under-performing' schools may be subjected to 'next-year audit.'
2	Implement School Improvement Plan	• Provide School Charter, a statement of vision and intent, • Long Term Plan of priorities, activities and schedules, • Short Term Plan of programs and objectives, and an • Annual Report to the District Office and the School Council, Parents and Friends or other representative body.
	Action Research Evaluation Sequence	Define evaluation together, define evaluation in context, review wider knowledge, evaluate consequences of options, select policies and strategies, action, evaluation of outcomes, redefine evaluation ...
3	Repeat Year 2	
4	Repeat Year 1	

Discussions with stakeholders then identified the justifications for these proposed policies. These arguments were assumed to indicate their collective webs of belief or theories concerning 'educative accountability.' They are summarised as a policy rationale in the next section.

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A RATIONALE FOR AN EDUCATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

The first pragmatic reason for having an educative accountability policy in Tasmanian public education, according to stakeholders, is to ensure that evaluation is done, seen to be done, seen to be reported and seen to be applied in a manner that is demonstrably educational in intent and outcome. Since an accountability relationship between parties exists in the knowledge that outcomes have 'high stakes' consequences for all stakeholders, a public policy needs to clarify three matters. It needs to formalize collective and personal obligations between the stakeholders. These obligations need to give practical expression to the metavalues of the organisation. The policy needs to specify obligatory criteria and processes.

The moral obligations involved in having an educative accountability policy, in the view of stakeholders, traces from the unique duty educational systems and institutions have in being expected to both reproduce and transform societies' values. Hence, a second reason for having an accountability policy in public education is ideological in nature. The nature of society itself is to remain a policy issue in the public domain. The specification of obligations and criteria for evaluation identifies the values being promoted so that they can be contested and affirmed.

Stakeholders also believe that the values of an accountability policy need to appreciate the sense of security, significance and solidarity intrinsic to a school community. Such an appreciation is not gratuitous. The Thatcherite and Reaganite versions of economic privatism were understood as denying the existence of society, devaluing the aesthetic and social purposes of publicly financed institutions, and as tantamount to seeing public schools not as assets of the state but as exotic liabilities.

A third major reason for having an accountability policy in education, according to Tasmanian stakeholders, concerns the capacity to sustain the moral economy of public organisations. A public accountability policy should express the reconciliation of plural principles, beliefs, values and interests in a policy community. It should do this in a way that enables professional and administrative activity to proceed confident of its significance and moral standing, and the appropriateness of its structures and technology. This also means that the structures of participation in educational governance are believed to be causally related to the learned capacities of policy makers that are used to convert complex and plural public values into effective policy settlements.

A fourth reason for having an accountability policy in education is that it may provide the conditions for improving the moral order of human relationships and structures in social institutions. Stakeholders appreciated their values being honoured, reconciled as reasonable obligations and discharged publicly. This position required three standards in public accountability. Accountability processes must remain open and fair. The accountability criteria used must remain explicit, be used in decision making and be documented. Those who make decisions must be held accountable for their consequences.

A fifth and equally important reason to stakeholders for having an accountability policy in education was strategic in nature. It was realised that governments constantly review their roles as demographics and that political priorities change. The move to SBM, LMS and 'self-management' structures was believed to have limited the capacity of systemic accountability policies to articulate the value of public education to society. Restricted views of 'the public interest' are also believed to have redefined public accountability as client accountability, which in turn, reduces the moral obligations to no more than maintaining market and or political relationships. It was also felt that a public accountability policy would be especially potent if it reiterated the civic purposes of public education, defined valuable knowledge for a complex democracy, offered strategies for demonstrating educational productivity, evoked communitarian values in key constituencies, and nurtured organisational learning capacities.

A sixth and related reason for having an accountability policy, stakeholders believe, is to sustain the quality of public policy discourse concerning education. Although 'public accountability' means accounting publicly in terms of the 'public interest,' some were aware the term has been co-opted in other settings to justify subordinating the goals of education to

the goals of the state, transferring power from professionals and school communities to the state, and shifting attention onto the means rather than the ends of accountability (Chitty, 1994). Similarly, while 'contractual accountability' means answering in terms of an employment contract, it has been altered to mean demonstrating fealty or 'political accountability' (accounting to political masters). 'Professional accountability' has been debased to mean 'answering to colleagues' and has been used to justify school image management. In sum, it is believed that an educative accountability policy should be conceptually rigorous, add to the quality of public policy discourse and display its educational and moral philosophy.

A seventh reason for having accountability policies in public education is that the values of the seemingly objective technologies involved may be contextualised and made contestable. For example, it is believed that while the OFSTED model of school evaluation in England and Wales appears to have improved in technical terms, it is yet to demonstrably discount SES effects, guarantee the reliability of inspectors, define 'value adding,' measurably 'add value' to school community development, acknowledge the pluralism of local (eg. multi cultural) communities, or cohere with other review and accountability mechanisms used in UK public education (Levacic, 1995). Some were aware of research (Radnor, Ball & Vincent, 1996) that was suggesting that if school communities continue to assert the need for greater distributional equity, and increasingly enact their legislated role in accountability in England and Wales, then a communitarian ethic in associational life can be expected to challenge the values of OFSTED technology with pluralistic local and regional public policy projects.

An eighth reason for having an accountability policy in education, in the view of stakeholders, concerns improving the structures and legitimacy of government. The view is that the contestability of an accountability policy helps insulate it from the vagaries of, and cynicism attached to, political credibility. This reiterated the value of the 'separation of powers' principle.

A ninth reason for having accountability policies in public education concerns the quality of society. Many believed that having an accountability policy in public education potentially freshens the democratic impulse in a civilised community. Both education and democratic society rely on accountability to recreate the legitimacy of structures, policies and practices, to sustain the rationality of organisations, and to retain the confidence of all participants and stakeholders. The logic was not unfamiliar, ancient and bears rehearsing.

Unlike other options, democratic accountability ensures that governors remain responsible to the governed for the quality of their stewardship. Three principles are involved. The delegation of the authority to govern proceeds only with the consent of the governed. This consent is conditional on the stewards of that delegated authority remaining accountable. Accountability processes and criteria must remain contestable. And, when these principles are in operation, and democratic accountability invests political authority in 'the people,' four values are potentially celebrated; individualism (the achievement of potential), liberty (freedoms consistent with order), equality (equity of opportunity, outcomes and access to power), and fraternity (cooperation in building a wholesome society). The history of accountability in the UK and USA suggests that when these principles and values are put aside, public education is put at peril (Macpherson, 1996c). In the final section I conclude with implications for future practice and research.

REFLECTIONS

Practices

The discussion above suggests that there are limits to the four-year school review model while acknowledging that it will constitute a major advance on previous practices. It is not as compelling as it might have been due to the way it has been 'pre-loved' or 'over owned' by district superintendents. While it was designed by these 'in-house' experts, who did consult extensively, the process traded off the benefits that would have accrued to real stakeholder participation in (say) a Tasmanian Policy Advisory Board of Education. Action research

creates new policy knowledge and commitment to changed structures and practices by allocating equal political trust in stakeholders, by deliberately suspending authority and by building a cooperative policy community.

The focus of the model is biased towards the quality of learning and leadership with progressively less emphasis on teaching, parenting and governance. The focus is not on the growth of school community policy knowledge or theories. It favours collecting standardised empirical data and objectified perceptions instead of building each school community's theory building capacities. It is more positivist that post-positivist in its methodology.

There are other problems that could surface in time. The limited access that district superintendents have to flexible resources suggests that the model will be shown to have a restricted capacity to be remedial. This will tend to compound rather than reconstruct cynicism and individualistic professionalism in some schools. The reliance on hierarchical line management runs counter to the principles of subsidiarity, pluriformity and complementarity valued by Tasmania stakeholders. It can be expected that some communities will find aspects of the model intolerant of local values, diversity and local cooperative policy making. The model could also encounter political controversy whenever it marginalises key stakeholders. It has already predefined evaluation categories and criteria and will probably partition involvement and knowledge in an arbitrary manner during operation. It has yet to declare its methodology for program evaluation.

On the other hand, there will be many opportunities for stakeholders to raise their voices as the ERU and district superintendents seek their cooperation in foreshadowed initiatives. Data collection instruments and methods will have to be designed. Licenses to use and modify survey materials and software will have to be negotiated. 'Clearing house' infrastructure to share school self-review resources will have to be negotiated. A networked accountability information system will have to be built that will offer site, systemic and comparative performance analysis. School communities will have to help design, participate in and respond to internal-external evaluations of learning, teaching, leadership, parenting and governance. School communities will have to develop their action research methods and cycles and planning processes to attend to site-specific priorities. School Community Development personnel, expert in the areas of co-governance with stakeholders, strategic leadership, co-planning and change management in a context of contracting budgets, will need to be appointed.

Theory

The study began by defining an 'educative' accountability policy as an expression of theories about what constitutes valuable knowledge, how learning can be demonstrated and improved, and how obligations should be discharged between stakeholders. This definition had to be broadened to include accounting for teaching, parenting, leading and governing. The project also highlighted why the consequences entailed by accountability policy should be handled as community projects.

It has been shown that practical advances may be made when accountability policies are developed in terms of practical processes (procedures, actions or methods) and criteria (standards, benchmarks or indicators). It has been suggested that the processes developed should trigger debate *how best to* collect data, report on and improve performances and services. The criteria to be developed through critical dialogue are those to be used to evaluate the quality of learning, teaching, parenting, leadership and governance. In this way, 'educative accountability' can be seen as a school community and system policy project intended to both 'prove' and 'improve' education through the active and critical engagement of stakeholders. The proposed unit of analysis and change is not practices but the theory used to justify policies.

The study demonstrated the potency of policy derived from pragmatic theories concerning mutual accountability, communitarian professionalism, educative leadership and democratic governance. The Habermasian ideas that relate accountability to legitimacy, structure and commitment in complex modern democracies proved useful. Future research in Australasia might employ the Lakatosian view that policy knowledge may be built on the touchstone

between seemingly incompatible perspectives. It might also use Quine & Ullian's notion that policy knowledge grows as a web of belief.

Research

Australasian systems could be well advised to use post-positivist and post-paradigmatic methodology (Evers & Lakomski, 1991). Research designs might balance five conjoint activities; mapping the theories currently being used to justify policies and practices, building them through the articulation of the common ground between perspectives, providing constant comparison with other theories, subjecting policy proposals to empirical tests vigorous conjecture and refutation, and creating cooperative policy communities. Other improvements can also be suggested.

There are other data analysis and interpretation methods that might be helpful in multi state research. Item and scale reliability coefficients could be calculated to verify validity and reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis could validate the structure of the instrument. Analysis of variance could identify significant differences on the ideal scale within and between schools and systems to measure degrees of support for policy proposals. As noted above, semantic differentials could measure the extent to which practices differ from ideals and indicate the need for intervention. Discriminant analysis could identify the groups of items that account for significantly different policy preferences between groups of stakeholders, schools and systems.

Given the effect that governance structures, political processes and political ideologies were found to have on accountability policy development in the US and in England and Wales, follow up research is also warranted in international settings. One purpose would be to examine how the politics of education are contributing to the reconstruction of accountability policies at site and systemic levels. Conversely, research might examine cases where accountability strategies and measures are being used increasingly to improve and direct schools and educational systems. Whatever, research needs to reconnect the policy problem of accountability to learning, teaching, parenting, leading and governing

Given this ends, case and policy studies and theoretical reflections are required to examine the politics and purposes of accountability in a context of pluralism, differentiated powers and contested structures. It is important to identify how strategic options and priorities concerning accountability processes and criteria are translated into the collection and use of performance data. It is important to understand better how accountability politics help reconstruct norms, beliefs and educational, management and governance practices. This is all to assume that accountability policy making is intimately linked to the politics of legitimation, access and equity, productivity, choice, excellence and community.

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